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## TESTIMONY - APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

### GOVERNOR'S BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR SFY 2018-2019

FEBRUARY 16, 2017

ELIZABETH B. RITTER, STATE DEPARTMENT ON AGING

Good afternoon Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Committee on Appropriations. My name is Elizabeth Ritter. I am the Commissioner of the State Department on Aging. I am here today to provide testimony on the Governor's Proposed Budget for SFYs 2018 and 2019.

As Connecticut continues to grapple with challenging budgets, I am pleased to reiterate the commitment at the State Department on Aging - to meet our mission to empower older adults to live full independent lives and to provide leadership on aging issues on behalf of older adults, families, caregivers, and advocates. This budget allows us to continue services that meet our mission, maximize the use of state funds to secure federal Older American Act (OAA) funding to the greatest extent possible, and help CT's residents live in the settings of their choice as they grow older.

### Overview

Connecticut is an aging state; aging at a slightly faster rate than most other states and currently ranked 7<sup>th</sup> among states with the oldest populations. Federal Older Americans Act (OAA) programs serve the 60 year and older population as well as adults with disabilities. Current US Census data shows CT having 21% of its population aged 60 and over, or 745,578 people, and 8.2% of the population aged 19 to 64 with disabilities, or 182,384 people. More critically, as the state has aged, pressures on families to care for their aging members at home have increased dramatically. The AARP estimates ([Valuing the Invaluable, 2015 Update](#)) that in 2015 over 459,000 unpaid caregivers provided over 427 million hours of care to Connecticut residents.

That care is valued at over \$5.9 billion. These demographics are playing, and will continue to play, a growing, dominate role in our state.

The State Department on Aging (SDA) is the state's lead agency in serving older adults, and the designated State Unit on Aging, as required under the federal Older Americans Act. We bring services to our population through a combination of funding from the federal OAA and the state's General Fund. These services are provided by way of our aging network, which is comprised of five area agencies on aging (AAA), senior centers, municipal agents on aging, service providers and dedicated volunteers and advocates.

The agency's core services are those associated with its federal designation as a State Unit on Aging. These programs rely upon state matching and "maintenance of effort" dollars to leverage federal OAA funding. The Governor's recommended budget maintains funding at levels that allow full participation by the state so as to obtain the maximum available federal funding for these core service programs:

- Nutrition: home delivered and congregate meals, nutrition education and nutrition counseling
- Long Term Care Ombudsman
- Elder rights
- Medicare assistance and fraud/abuse prevention
- Health promotion, including fall prevention
- Caregiver support
- Employment services for older workers
- Congregate housing services

The agency also oversees programs that are solely supported with state funding. These include the CT Statewide Respite Care Program (commonly called the Alzheimer's Respite Program), services provided by the Center for Medicare Advocacy, Fall Prevention activities, and senior center programming in New Britain.

SDA works in collaboration with the Departments of Social Services, Public Health, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Housing, Labor, Veterans Affairs and Correction, and the Office of Policy and Management on various initiatives to support CT's residents. SDA also participates on task forces, planning committees, multi-agency collaborations, and work groups. This past year, the agency saw 2,122,000 meals served to 22,900 individuals in congregate and home settings. SDA also successfully obtained \$785,000 in additional funding for three discretionary grant initiatives and is completing an application for another grant.

2017 is SDA's "State Plan Year". Required under the Older American Act, the State Plan is used by the agency to provide a comprehensive plan for the three years beginning October 1, 2017. Beginning in September of 2016, we held listening sessions around the state, collaborated with the five Area Agencies on Aging as they prepare their Regional Plans, and have been actively soliciting ideas and feedback from the aging network. A public hearing will be scheduled for review and comment in the late spring before the Plan goes to the Governor and then the federal Administration for Community Living for approval.

### **Proposed FY 2018 – FY 2019 Budgetary Changes**

The proposed budget reduces staffing levels under the Office of the State Long Term Care Ombudsman. One position to be vacated due to a planned retirement is recommended to be eliminated. Savings of \$90,466 to the Personal Services account will result.

The Regional Long Term Care Ombudsman (RO) is responsible for the health and welfare of the residents of skilled nursing facilities, residential care homes and assisted living facilities in a designated region. In addition, the position supports the numerous activities of the Office of the State Long Term Care Ombudsman. One of nine ROs currently covering the state will not be replaced, necessitating "triaging" of cases and the assignment of a greater number of homes/residents to the remaining eight Regional Ombudsmen. Over 35,000 residents who are entitled to Ombudsman representation live in facilities throughout the state. In FFY 2016, more than 3,000 complaints from residents and their families were handled. The Office supported residents during five nursing home closures and one receivership in FFY 2016. Additionally, the Office accepted appointment as the federal Patient Care Ombudsman in seven homes during bankruptcy reorganization. In all likelihood, Ombudsman activities will be significantly diminished due to the loss of this position. The focus must remain on residents, resulting in lengthier times to resolution of complaints, diminished capacity for advocacy and consumer outreach and education, and reduced support of other agencies in their work.

The recommended budget also reflects savings of \$83,787 from reallocating the salary of an Associate Research Analyst from state funding to a federal grant (OAA Title III B Supportive Services). This strategy was adopted in the current fiscal year to allow SDA to operate within available funds after the allocation of bottom-line lapses contained in Public Act 16-2 (May Spec. Sess.) After adjusting for fringe benefits and other indirect charges, \$199,993 less will be

available under the federal grant to support community-based services. Currently, these Title III B funds are used to provide services under OAA programs, including Title III B Supportive Services, Title III C Congregate and Home Delivered Meals, and Title III D Preventive Health Care, in addition to agency administration. The Area Agencies on Aging allocate these funds to services based on their client/program needs.

Finally, funding is reduced under the Other Expenses (\$3,696) and the Programs for Seniors (\$179,110) accounts to reflect the continuation of FY 2017 allocated bottom-line lapses.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.